



Mississippi State Department of Health
Mississippi Department of Education

Dear Parent,

Novel H1N1 (swine) flu has been diagnosed in children in several schools around the state. While this is an unusual time of year for the flu to be circulating throughout Mississippi, the new flu virus causes an illness similar to what we see every year in the winter and early spring months; its severity and duration of illness are just like seasonal flu.

Novel H1N1 (swine) flu is an illness that usually includes fever with cough, sore throat, headache and /or muscle aches, and possibly nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting. Most people – children and adults – who are otherwise healthy will completely recover in a few days. Pregnant women and children younger than five years old and anyone with chronic heart or lung problems (including asthma), are at risk for complications like pneumonia and hospitalization. If your child or anyone else in the family fits in any of these groups and develops the flu, call your primary healthcare provider for further instructions and guidance.

The flu is spread from one person to another through small droplets from the nose and mouth of an ill person (just like flu is spread during the winter flu season). These tiny droplets can also spread the virus onto surfaces, where it can survive for a few hours.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not currently recommend school closures as an effective way to prevent flu in the schools. Your school is taking action to prevent spread of this flu as much as possible, including: a focus on hygiene and hand washing; custodial training and regular sanitizing maintenance; isolating ill children waiting to go home; and remaining in daily contact with the Mississippi State Department of Health should more action be required.

We are asking that you and your family take precautions to protect yourselves and others.

- **Hand washing**—children should be taught to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If no soap and water are available, alcohol based hand sanitizers should be used.
- **Coughing and sneezing** -- children should be taught to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available) and throw the tissue in the trash after use, then wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- **Children who become ill while at school** will be put in a separate area from others and parents will be notified to pick them up.

- **Illness in the family**—If someone in your household is ill with the flu, please keep them away from other family members – especially those who are under five years of age, those who are pregnant and those with chronic heart or lung problems.
- **Routine cleaning** -- Routinely clean areas that the ill person touches often with the cleaners that you typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and special cleaners is not necessary.
- **Stay home when sick**— children with symptoms that could mean the flu (fever with cough, sore throat, headache and /or muscle aches, and possibly nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting) should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, (without the use of Tylenol or other fever-lowering medicines). **If your child is ill enough to need medical care, please call the physician's office first or tell the emergency department personnel when you enter, so they can arrange for your child to be separate from other patients.** Your child will not require a doctor's note for return to school, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

A vaccine against novel H1N1 (swine) flu will be available, possibly by mid- October. You will receive information about how to get your children vaccinated against swine flu as the vaccine becomes available. In addition, parents are encouraged to have their children vaccinated against regular seasonal flu as well.

For further information, parents may call the State Department of Health's hotline at 1-877-222-9FLU (1-877-222-9358) or visit the Mississippi State Department of Health's website at www.HealthyMS.com.

Sincerely,

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